

## **“Saved by the outsider” Luke 10:25-37**

**Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”**

**But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’**

**Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”**

Today for our reflections we have the famous parable of the Good Samaritan. But our reading is not only about the parable, there is also the conversation that took place between Jesus and the lawyer, or the teacher of the Law.

As the conversation develops and as the parable of the Good Samaritan is told, Jesus remarkably turns upside down two of our dearest conviction. Or we could say that He destroys two of the assumptions held true by most people, and probably by many of those who identify as Christians.

On these two assumptions and on how Jesus turns them upside down, we will reflect today. One is about what we must do to inherit eternal life? The other is about our neighbour. About who is our neighbour, as Jesus defines it.

The whole conversation between Jesus and the lawyer is about what must be done to inherit the eternal life, but we will begin by first looking at how Jesus redefines who our neighbours are and then we will talk about how to inherit eternal life.

Now, the world is a harsh place, this much we know. It is not easy to survive and live in it. We are incredibly blessed to live in the Western world, it makes our lives so much easier. For the rest of the world this life is even much harsher.

There is always someone who wants to take advantage on you. There is always someone who doesn't want to be just and fair with you. There is always someone who wants to use their power against you. Thus, our lives to great extent are spent battling against these external forces.

And for sure, that is even harder to survive on your own. We need others to help us. To stand with us as we battle through the life. Others, whom we can trust, on whom we can rely, on whose help we can hope if needed.

This harsh reality compels us to create our groups, to gather together people who would make up our network of support. The smallest of such groups is our family. If we are blessed to have one.

Then it may be extended family, or business, or community organized on regional bases, or on national bases, or on interest bases, as, for example, so called faith communities, like Christian congregations in Barossa.

What happens? Inevitably we get to these two categories. Us and them. Our people and the others. Insiders and outsiders. Locals and not locals. Christians and non-Christians. My congregation, and the others. Or as in this parable, in the lawyer's thinking, it was those who are our neighbours and those who are not.

Jesus speaks in this reality of our fallen world and what He says in this parable and elsewhere not only destroys these two separate categories, but is rather shocking. The lawyer wanted to justify himself and wanted to clarify who are the people he is supposed to love, who are his neighbours? Jesus turns the whole thing around.

He tells this parable and then He asks: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is totally changing how we understand who our neighbours are. It is not about some natural or human built groups or allegiances or networks.

We need to become a neighbour to anyone who is in need. That person, who lays on the road where we walk, that person becomes our neighbour. That person whom God has put in our lives, and who needs our help – that very person becomes our neighbour. That is how Jesus redefines who our neighbour is.

Do you see what it does? It basically means that we can never get to the stage where we could say, as the lawyer was hoping, that, yes, I have loved all my neighbours. There is always more to be done, always.

And as if this wasn't challenging enough a revelation, with this parable Jesus also shows how we need to love our neighbours. Now, let's take a look at what Jesus teaches us through the figure of the Good Samaritan about how we are supposed to love others. By the way, did you notice, that the Samaritan was the other?

The outsider. From those people, whom the Jews considered unclean, lower than themselves. He wasn't one of them. It would make sense, if he was helping one of his own people. But he is helping someone, who may be considered his enemy.

And how does he do it? Risking with his life. The priest and the Levite passed by the beaten and unconscious man. They had many good reasons to do that. For one, they didn't know where the robbers were? They may have been just there, waiting for someone to stop to attack them as well.

The priest and the Levite didn't do anything unreasonable. The Good Samaritan did. He sees the man half dead lying on the road. He is moved with pity. He stops. He gets off his animal. He bandages his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them.

He puts the beaten and robbed man on his animal, and takes him to the inn. He travels, so to speak, into enemy's territory. As those who have studied the Eastern culture describe this situation, – by bringing the beaten man into village, the Good Samaritan puts his life at risk, for the villagers in the outburst of anger for what had happen could easily attack the Samaritan.

He takes the man to the inn and takes care of him. “The next day he takes out two denarii (it is an average salary for two full working days), gives them to the innkeeper, and says, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’”

So, if you want to know how to love your neighbour, here is it, go and do likewise. Except, we can't. As this parable illustrates even those that were considered the best, the fairest, the most compassionate, the priest and the Levite, they failed.

Remember, that the initial question was about – what must I do to inherit the eternal life. None of what Jesus here teaches, neither how He redefines who our neighbours are, nor now teaching how we are supposed to love them, none of this serves as an instruction for self-salvation.

They both serve to show that it is impossible for us to do anything to inherit eternal life. It simply can't be done. That is like – yes, jump over this 10m high wall and you will be saved. What Jesus says serves to help us to realize that the right question to ask is not “what must I do”, but “who can help me”.

When we listen to stories, or parables, we tend to identify with some of the characters. I assume we would wish to be able to identify with the Good Samaritan. However, even in the best-case scenario we would perhaps be able to rise to be like the priest or the Levite.

As many theologians have pointed it out, there is a person with whom we should identify, the one that fits the best our situation. And this one is – the beaten and robbed man, who lies unconscious and half-dead in the middle of the road.

We are like him. Beaten and robbed and left to die not only by exhausting hardships and challenges of this life, but also and especially by our sin and idols and by the devil. They have overpowered us, they are much stronger than us, and we can't stand against them.

And there is no saviour found among our people. Even the best among our people can't help us. The best insiders, the noblest, be it our political, or economical, or religious leaders – they can help only in a limited way in this life, but not at all when it comes to the life to come.

As we lay beaten, robbed and half-dead, or as Paul the apostle writes to Ephesians, as fully dead in our sins, we need an outsider to come and help. We need the true Good Samaritan to come and rescue us.

We need someone who is willing to risk with everything, even with His life, to save those who may consider Him their enemy. And we just happen to have such outsider, traveling on the same road where we go, ready to help. Jesus from Nazareth is His name.

He is very much like the Good Samaritan. Considered outsider and stranger by almost everyone. In Latvia many considered that this business with Jesus Christ was brought and imposed by Germans from outside.

Germans would complain that this Jesus was brought to them from outside as some Jewish faith. The Jews called Jesus Samaritan. And the Samaritans rejected Jesus for He was the Jew. He is outsider to everyone. He is outsider to the humanity.

While He was rejected and despised by us, He saw us beaten and robbed and helpless. He came to rescue us. He not only risked with His life, but He allowed Himself to be beaten and murdered.

He gave up His life for us when we were still His enemies. There is no greater love than that. But still, He is hated by so many, as are His messengers, and the message that He is here to rescue everyone from what destroys us as human creatures, – from our sins, from our idols, from the power of the devil and death.

This is the true lesson from this parable. Not about what we need to do, but what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the true Good Samaritan has done for us. We don't need to do anything to inherit the eternal life. Inheritance by definition is not something anyone can earn. It is inherited by those who have some relationships with the one who leaves the inheritance. And this is what Jesus has done for you.

He not only comes to rescue us from sin and death, He also makes you a member of His family. And as such you qualify to the inheritance that now awaits you. Not because you merited it, but because you were adopted into Jesus' family.

Because the true Good Samaritan was willing to risk everything, to be attacked, beaten, killed, so that only He could rescue you. No price seemed too high for Him, for that is how precious you are for Him.

What must we do then? Just remain with Jesus. With your committed Outsider. Remain in His Word. Don't take this gift lightly, the robbers are not far away, they are just waiting for the moment to take you down. Hold fast to Jesus.

Stick to Him whenever He comes to you and speaks to you. And sure, we should love our neighbours as well, but not because we want to do something to inherit eternal life, but because it is ours already, and we want others to have it as well.

That's about it. It is simple. Jesus has done it all. It is finished. Be assured.

Amen.